



490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

**Danaher Creek Westslope Cutthroat Trout Broodstock Project
Decision Notice
July 7, 2009**

Proposal

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) proposes to remove approximately 300 juvenile westslope cutthroat trout (WCT, *Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*) from Danaher Creek and adjacent tributaries in the Bob Marshall Wilderness using electrofishing and angling equipment. Fish would be transported by packstock out of the wilderness and, if feasible, would be used to establish a within-drainage broodstock at Sekokini Springs for restoration efforts associated with the South Fork Flathead Drainage Westslope Cutthroat Trout Conservation Program. The most important factor in establishing a broodstock is to spawn enough individuals such that the genetic diversity within the wild source population is reliably incorporated into the brood. Consequently, the objective of this project is to collect sufficient numbers of juvenile westslope cutthroat trout so that a minimum of 25 adult breeding pairs survive and contribute offspring. Genetic testing will be used to ensure that the offspring produced from mating fish collected from the wild adequately comprises the genetic variation contained within the wild donor population from Danaher Creek. If the rearing of the fish proves unsuccessful (for example, not enough fish survive to maturity or there is not sufficient genetic variation), the remaining fish would be transferred to a cutthroat-trout-only kids' fishing pond.

Environmental Policy Act Process

MFWP is required to assess potential impacts of the proposed project to the human and physical environment. In compliance with requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), a draft environmental assessment (EA) was completed by MFWP and released for public comment in May 2009. The proposed project is listed as an approved action under the MFWP/USFS Cooperative Agreement for Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management on National Forest Wilderness Lands in Montana and does not require USFS analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Public notices were posted in local newspapers, and details of the project were aired on an outdoor radio broadcast and discussed at a public meeting in Kalispell. Copies of the EA were available at the Region One headquarters in Kalispell and on the MFWP website.

Three comments were received during the 30-day public comment period on the draft EA; all were in support of the proposed project. There were no modifications to the draft EA based on public comment, and the draft EA and decision notice serve as the final document.

Summary of issues addressed in the Environmental Assessment (EA)

- Use of nonmechanized methods to preserve wilderness values and character.
- Potential adverse effects to the westslope cutthroat trout population in Danaher Creek.
- Genetic and disease testing to ensure the Danaher population is suitable for use as a donor source of westslope cutthroat trout.

Decision

Through the MEPA process, MFWP found no significant impacts on the human or physical environments associated with this project that could not be mitigated. Therefore, the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and an environmental impact statement is not required.

Based on the EA, public comment, and the fisheries conservation benefits that this project would provide, it is my decision to proceed with the Danaher Creek broodstock project. This alternative provides the best opportunity for long-term conservation of westslope cutthroat trout in the South Fork Flathead watershed.



James R. Satterfield Jr., Ph.D.
Regional Supervisor

Date: July 7, 2009